

**May 31, 2018**

A Special Meeting regarding FY 2018-19 Proposed Budget of the Bladen County Board of Commissioners was held on Thursday, May 31, 2018 at 4:00 pm in the Commissioner's Room on the lower level of the Courthouse, 106 East Broad Street, Elizabethtown, NC.

Members present were:

Ray Britt, Chairman

Michael Cogdell

Charles R. Peterson

Daniel Dowless

Arthur Bullock

Dr. Ophelia Munn-Goins (arrived at 4:10pm)

Russell Priest

Ashley Trivette

David Gooden

**ITEM 1. Call to Order:**

Chairman Britt called the meeting to order at 4:02pm.

Chairman Britt provided an invocation. County Manager Greg Martin led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ITEM 2. Fiscal Year 2018-19 Proposed Budget Information and Discussion: (Greg Martin, County Manager)**

- A. Chairman Britt opened the floor for discussion regarding the proposed FY 2018-19 Budget.

Commissioner Peterson inquired of the effect on budget regarding the proposed 1.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). Mr. Martin indicated that a 1.5% COLA would increase the budget by approximately \$225,000.

Commissioner Cogdell inquired regarding the compensation study which was fully funded in the FY 2017-18 Budget.

Chairman Britt asked the Board to remember that the budget is tight as presented. Proposed expenses nearly mirror the anticipated revenues, with an amount identified to be transferred from Fund Balance for capital expenditures.

Commissioner Peterson indicated his request to look at the possibility of a 3% COLA. He shared that the County worked diligently to implement a compensation study and he wanted the county to maintain the process. If a COLA was not funded steadily, the County would be in the same state in just a couple of years.

Mr. Martin reviewed projected property tax revenue, a large revenue category representing approximately 50% of revenue. The proposed budget includes a \$600,000 increase in property tax revenues, which is an aggressive collection percentage. The proposed transfer from Fund Balance is \$1.5 million to fund capital purchases and projects.

Commissioner Munn-Goins entered the meeting (4:10pm).

Commissioner Trivette inquired regarding unpaid property taxes which may be delinquent. Mr. Martin indicated that delinquent property taxes are not included as revenues. He reviewed recent trends in property tax collection versus projected property tax revenues. He stated that for the proposed budget, the property tax collection rate was increased from 95% to 95.5%.

Commissioner Cogdell inquired regarding the current year Fund Balance transfer in the amount of \$2.2 million. Mr. Martin reviewed FY 2017-18 projections which include the possibility of an additional \$700,000 transfer from Fund Balance.

Chairman Britt recommended that the Board challenge Mr. Martin to find a way to fund a 3% COLA for employees, including the possibility of tapping into Fund Balance if necessary.

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Upon a motion by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Trivette, the Board unanimously requested a 3% Cost of Living Adjustment for all employees to be included in the FY 2018-19 Proposed Budget.

Mr. Martin indicated that he would review the Budget in order to include the 3% COLA, as he would prefer not to fund a recurring expense based on Fund Balance transfer. Stability of Fund Balance is paramount for the County of Bladen, its employees and residents. He stated that capital expenditures for FY 2018-19 will be reviewed closely.

Commissioner Cogdell inquired regarding a Recreation Matching Grant program to support outlying communities. He proposed earmarking the Contingency line item in the amount of \$110,000 for Recreational opportunities. Mr. Martin expressed concern regarding utilizing the entire amount for Recreational matching grant programs. He stated that a number of Sheriff Deputies are planning to retire during the upcoming year. A portion of the \$110,000 could be retained to cover vacation payout, law enforcement officers' separation allowance. Mr. Martin indicated that approximately \$50,000 would be helpful to fund vacation payouts and separation allowances for retiring Sheriff's Office employees.

Commissioner Cogdell queried if appropriating \$60,000 to be used for Recreation projects in outlying communities, and to be used at the discretion of the Board upon receipt of funding applications for projects. Chairman Britt suggested applying a cap in the policy for each project. Commissioner Cogdell reminded the Board that a matching recreation project policy has not yet been approved by the Board and that a "not to exceed" cap could be included.

Commissioner Peterson shared his concerns regarding a recreation project grant fund to subsidize community efforts when Parks and Recreation carries a \$324,000 annual budget for the benefit of the entire county. He stated that if there are needs within the county, the Board would need to look to the Department Director and County Manager for proposals to increase Parks and Recreation Department's annual budget to provide additional services.

Commissioner Cogdell introduced a motion to allocate \$60,000 from the Contingency line item to support recreational needs in outlying areas of the county, to be approved at the discretion of the Board. Commissioner Bullock provided a second.

Mr. Martin provided additional information regarding a line item in the amount of \$3,000 within the Parks & Recreation budget for special appropriation to communities that apply for the funds to assist with offsetting costs associated with recreational projects. Commissioner Cogdell stated that the program allows up to a \$500 annual contribution and also carries stipulations for use of funds.

Chairman Britt reiterated the previous motion introduced by Commissioner Cogdell, as follows: Upon a motion by Commissioner Cogdell, seconded by Commissioner Bullock, the Board voted to allocate \$60,000 from a Contingency line item to support recreational needs in outlying areas of the county, to be approved at the discretion of the Board, by a vote of six (6) AYES (Cogdell, Bullock, Priest, Britt, Trivette, Munn-Goins) to three (3) NOES (Peterson, Gooden, Dowless).

Commissioner Gooden voiced concern regarding a part time position at Extension. Mr. Martin stated that a full-time position has been included in the proposed FY 2018-19 budget. He stated that even with the position being reclassified to a full time position, the County's allocation to Extension has decreased for FY 2018-19.

Commissioner Munn-Goins stepped out of the meeting (4:40pm).

Commissioner Gooden expressed appreciation for the position being included. Commissioner Cogdell inquired regarding a grant writer position that would serve the County. Mr. Martin stated that large municipalities and counties may be able to fund a grant writer. He indicated that contracting with a professional grant writer would be more cost effective.

Commissioner Munn-Goins returned to the meeting (4:42pm).

Mr. Martin indicated that Bladen County has had success with contracted grant writers, specifically in the Health Department.

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Commissioner Peterson expressed concern regarding the potential need for an additional Information Technology (IT) position. Mr. Martin reviewed current staffing levels for IT support; three (3) full-time IT positions and one (1) full-time IT support at the Department of Social Services (DSS). IT Director Robin Hewett shared that the DSS IT Support position has evolved into a front desk supervisor. It appears that fewer dedicated IT hours are being realized. Mr. Hewett requested an additional two (2) IT positions; one (1) position for the Sheriff's Office, and one (1) for DSS.

Chairman Britt briefly recessed the meeting at 4:49pm.

Chairman Britt reconvened the meeting at 5:00pm.

EMS Director David Howell shared concerns regarding an occasion when the telephone system was inoperable for a period of 8-12 hours and calls had to be rerouted to supervisor's cell phones. Mr. Howell stated that he understood that the IT Department was extremely busy and responded as quickly as possible. He also stated that the telephone system was integral to the non-emergency transport service. Mr. Hewett stated that there is a telephone system switch which is causing issues and is scheduled to be replaced. Mr. Howell also shared that he had reached out to the Sheriff's Office IT staff person for assistance when necessary.

Mr. Hewett stated that the County of Bladen was one of the first counties in NC to be affected by a computer virus in 2017. North Carolina DSS has provided requirements regarding HIPAA regulations recently, which has bottlenecked all county DSS offices. There are fines associated with not being able to or not following regulations, which could lead to lawsuits.

Discussion ensued regarding upcoming audits, HIPAA regulations, strengthening systems, and performance evaluations of systems and processes by which confidential information is being input for services. Mr. Hewett stated that two (2) IT positions are being requested; one (1) to be assigned to DSS and one (1) to be assigned to the Sheriff's Office.

Chairman Britt recognized Sheriff McVicker to address the Board.

Sheriff McVicker expressed appreciation to the Board for support which his department has received. He stated that his department originally requested four (4) detention officer and three (3) deputy positions. He stated that the four (4) detention officer positions were included, but not the three (3) deputy positions.

Sheriff McVicker presented a request to include four (4) additional detention officer positions, for a total of eight (8) new positions for the FY 2018-19 budget. He stated that a detention officer could be utilized for transport which would alleviate law enforcement officers to provide transportation. He stated that with the eight (8) additional officers, that staffing levels would be in line with the recommendations included as a part of the Detention and Law Enforcement Center project. He also plans to realign shifts from only 7am-7pm, and 7pm-7 am. He has already started an additional shift to start to 4pm-4am; and 4am-4pm. By this revision, there should be five (5) deputies working Bladen County during daylight hours, and six (6) deputies working the county from 4pm-4am; and three (3) deputies working 4am-7am.

Sheriff McVicker briefly discussed the misdemeanor program, which has generated \$124,000 since November 2017. The Bladen County program started with 20 beds with the program. Currently, there are 24 beds assigned to the program, with plans to increase the count to 40. He stated that the income projection for FY 2018-19 is \$365,000 based on 25 participants in the misdemeanor program.

Commissioner Dowless made a motion to approve four (4) additional detention officer positions for a total of eight (8) to be included in the FY 2018-19 Budget. Commissioner Trivette provided a second. Discussion followed the motion and second.

Sheriff McVicker stated that three (3) deputies will be retiring in the upcoming fiscal year from the fifty-three (53) positions. He would fill the vacancies at an appropriate time to maintain current staffing levels. He also

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stated that with the eight additional detention officers, the staffing level would be a total of thirty-four detention staff members (34), which will allow for eight officers for day shift and eight officers for night shift.

Sheriff McVicker voiced his appreciation of a 3% COLA which will assist in retaining long-time officers.

Chairman Britt revisited the motion on the floor. Upon a motion by Commissioner Dowless, seconded by Commissioner Trivette, the Board unanimously approved an additional four (4) detention officers to be included in the FY 2018-19 Budget.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Trivette, seconded by Commissioner Bullock, the meeting as adjourned at 5:27pm.

ATTEST:

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Maria C. Edwards, Clerk to the Board

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Ray Britt, Chairman